

A (Green) Star is Born

Michelin's latest culinary distinction champions sustainability in the restaurant industry

BY REBECCA L. RHOADES



Blue Hill at Stone Barns Fall 2022. Photo by Elena Wolfe

Ever since intrepid adventurers took their first automotive trips across the country, people have sought suggestions on where to stop for a bite to eat. And for more than a century, discriminating travelers have turned to the Michelin Guide for a list of the best fine dining establishments across the globe. Now, Michelin is recognizing food that doesn't just taste great but that's also great for our planet through its latest designation: the Michelin Green Star.

FROM TIRES TO FOOD

The origins of the iconic Michelin Guide hark back to the early years of the automobile.

In 1889, Andre and Edouard Michelin founded a tire business in a small town in France. Today, that eponymous company is the second largest tire manufacturer in the world. To increase demand for automobiles — and, therefore, Michelin tires — the brothers printed a booklet that included maps, instructions on tire repair, and a list of restaurants, hotels, mechanics, and gas stations throughout France.



The guide, and its restaurant reviews, became increasingly popular, and more editions were added, with the first U.S. version published in 2005.

In 1926, the brothers began to award stars to fine dining establishments that were listed in their guide — and the prestigious Michelin Star was born. By 1931, a hierarchy of one, two, and three stars was introduced, all based on the quality of cuisine. According to the Michelin Guide, one star denotes a very good restaurant in its category, two means excellent cooking that's worth a detour, and three

is the *crème de la crème*, described as “exceptional cuisine, worth a special journey.”

Almost 100 years later, Michelin continues to publish its annual guide, or “red book” as it is commonly called, and receiving a revered star still is considered a top industry honor. The guide also showcases Michelin Recommended restaurants — ones that are above average but not at star level — and, since 1997, Bib Gourmand eateries, those that serve good food at reasonable prices.

More than 16,000 restaurants worldwide are showcased this year in Michelin Guides. Of those, 447 are honored with the Green Star.

GOING GREEN

Introduced internationally in 2019 and rolled out in the U.S. one year later, the Green Star honors restaurants that are leaders in sustainable gastronomy.

According to Gwendal Poullennec, international director of the Michelin Guides, sustainability is an important part of the vision and corporate strategy of The Michelin Group. The company increasingly uses bio-sourced and regenerated materials such as corn husks, waste wood, and plastic containers in the production of its tires and other products.

“Michelin’s goal is to be carbon neutral in all areas of its business by 2050,” he says.

Poullennec points out that the Green Star is not a culinary distinction like the star or Bib Gourmand but instead a complementary one.

“Any restaurant from the Michelin Guide’s selection — no matter its culinary distinction — can receive a Michelin Green Star if its involvement in sustainable gastronomy is particularly

impressive and inspiring,” he comments.

Recipients of the Green Star are selected based on research and data collected from Michelin Guide inspectors who visit the eateries anonymously. While there are no set requirements for achieving a Green Star, awarded restaurants have established day-to-day environmentally friendly initiatives, such as food waste reduction, recycling, reducing reliance on single-use products, cooking with seasonal and local produce, and the promotion of local and ethical ingredient sourcing.

“The restaurants selected are those which, for the Michelin Guide, have a truly virtuous global approach or implement inspiring initiatives in the management of their establishment dealing with many topics like the origin of the products; the respect of seasonality; the initiatives to reduce or valorize food waste; the capacity of the teams to

sensibilize the clients to their sustainable approach; and much more,” Poullennec explains. “By awarding some restaurants with a Michelin Green Star, we want to indicate to the clients the most committed establishments that offer not only a very nice gastronomic experience but also an inspiring and impacting one when considering sustainable gastronomy.”

Blue Hill at Stone Barns in Tarrytown, N.Y., is no stranger to Michelin’s accolades. The two-star restaurant, which opened in 2004 on a working organic farm that was once part of a sprawling Rockefeller estate, is considered the gold standard for farm-to-table fine dining. The Michelin Guide reads, “The tasting menu offered here echoes the farm’s seasonal best and might very well change the way you think about food.”

Badger Flame Beet dish from Blue Hill at Stone Barns.
Photo by Andre Baranowski



Blue Hill received a Green Star in 2021.

A more environmentally conscious culinary world is the goal for Blue Hill's chef Dan Barber. "That way of thinking is the engine that drives everything we do," he says.

Barber points out that the restaurant sources local organic grains, such as wheat, for its breads and buys rotation grains, including buckwheat, barley, millet, and rye, from farmers who support soil health. But the chef is known especially for his zero-waste philosophy and promotion of consuming the whole vegetable or animal.

"We need to reframe our definition of waste," Barber says. "For example, 190 million acres of corn and soy is fed to cows. That is the very definition of waste. Single-purpose chickens, also fed on corn, is a waste."

"Food waste doesn't just mean vegetable peels, and our interest is in reframing a wasteful food industry as a whole," he continues. "We do this beginning in the field and pasture: grass-fed beef and grass-fed milk — not fed a lick of grain — and waste-fed pigs that are fed scraps from the kitchen, expired dairy, and the spent grains from local breweries. And we work with



JUSTIN garden harvest. Photo courtesy of JUSTIN

vegetable and grain breeders to develop delicious varieties that give better yield, are blight-resistant, have lower input, and require less energy to produce."

Diners at Blue Hill are even served using "bone china" dishware crafted by Pennsylvania artist Gregg Moore from actual bones that are leftover in the kitchen. Recently, Moore developed what he calls "200% bone china." Broken or chipped bone china from the restaurant is ground up and recycled into new dinner plates. "It's taking an approach that even a zero-waste philosophy doesn't go far enough," Barber says.

Grass-fed bone china and soil charger place setting at Blue Hill. Photo by Alice Gao



One of the newest additions to the Green Star club is The Restaurant at Justin. In December 2022, the elegant eatery, which is nestled among the grape-covered hills of Justin Vineyards & Winery in Paso Robles, California, received both a Green Star as well as a coveted Michelin star.

The kitchen is run by chef Rachel Haggstrom, who is celebrated for her upscale farm-to-table cooking style and use of fresh, local, seasonal produce, most of which is grown on-site. According to Haggstrom, 95% of the menu's ingredients are sourced locally — from either the winery's 26-acre garden,

which includes a 150-tree orchard, edible flower fields, vegetables, herbs, and an apiary, or from a community of Central Coast purveyors.

“I love watching each day as ingredients cultivate within the garden, steps away from The Restaurant, to then translate to the plate, and finally how that dish not only nourishes the person but also their soul,” Haggstrom said in a press release announcing the Green Star designation.

A LONG WAY TO GO

Blue Hill at Stone Barns and The Restaurant at Justin are two of only 13 Green Star restaurants in the U.S. They join such elite culinary powerhouses as Noma and Alchemist in Denmark, Maaemo in Norway, La Côte Saint-Jacques in France, L’Effervescence in Japan, Dill in Iceland, and The French Laundry and The Inn at Little Washington, both in the U.S.

Eleven of America’s Green Star restaurants are based in California.

According to Poullennec, while the U.S. is not as advanced as other parts of the world when it comes to sustainable gastronomy, the Golden State is leading the way in eco-initiatives. “California has several restaurants that are clearly role models for the industry and for us all, in terms of sustainability,” he says. “The fact that the state has such a high concentration of Michelin Green Stars is testament



JUSTIN chef garden. Photo courtesy of JUSTIN

to the culinary scene’s strong commitment to the environment.”

Barber adds that one of the main reasons the U.S. lags in culinary sustainability is because it lacks cuisine that reflects its local ecology— which he says is at the core of a responsible regenerative way of cooking. “Chefs have a chance to change that,” he explains. “They can create community around food by cooking in a way that celebrates their regional landscape. Establishing an intimate relationship between food and place is essential to any cohesive food system —

and to what will be on our plates in years to come.

“People are becoming more demanding. They want to know where their food comes from and how it was grown,” he continues. “We’re hard-wired to want the kind of story the big food chain can’t provide. The Green Star existing at all is a reflection of that.”

So the next time you’re planning a cross-country road trip or an international vacation, and you want to sample the region’s best cuisine — while also supporting innovative and eco-minded chefs — visit guide.michelin.com and look for the green clover emblem that designates Green Star restaurants. 🌿

JUSTIN lobster dish. Photo courtesy of JUSTIN

